



Soviet Film Criticism / #####R#####

Steven P. Hill

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STEVEN P. HILL

СОВЕТСКАЯ КИНОКРИТИКА

(“*Sovietskaya Kinocritica*”—*Soviet Film Criticism*)

*For this issue we have asked a student of Russian film publications to survey the Russian critical scene—with special attention to recent issues of the leading Russian film monthly, *ISKUSSTVO KINO*, whose contents are a mystery to most Americans. We do so in the hope that as the US-USSR film exchange program develops readers may be in a better position to evaluate new developments in the Soviet film industry.*

“Four years ago the party and government assigned us the task of creating a great Soviet motion picture industry—at a time especially ripe for the assignment of such a task . . . in 1950–52 the number of films released annually by our studios could without difficulty be counted on the fingers of one hand. And this caused a long standstill for many recognized masters and closed the way to beginners’ independent work . . . there was nothing on which creative competition could develop. . . . We have made a gigantic leap. We have reestablished the productive base of cinematography, whipped together truly capable staffs, introduced to production staffs of skillful, sometimes really talented young people.”—Director Serge Vasiliev, *Iskusstvo kino*, 1957.11:63–4.

“The Soviet motion picture industry has reached a high level of development. Soviet studios now release around 800 films annually, 130 of them full-length. . . . Last year the Soviet film industry participated in more than 20 international competitions and won 35 prizes and honorary certificates.”—USSR Minister of Culture N. Mikhailov, *Iskusstvo kino*, ’59.8:17.

“For all that, the mass production line of cold commercial articles has certainly continued to exist. . . . But breaks in its chain are becoming more and more frequent. Suffice it to name such productions of recent years as the magnificent *Poem of the Sea*, *Quiet Don*, *Cranes Are Flying*, *Stories of Lenin*, *Communist*, *House I Live In*, *A Man’s Fate*, *The Idiot*, *Fatima* . . .”—L. Pogozheva, editor, *Iskusstvo kino*, ’59.6:72.

As the above statements testify, the film industry of the USSR has undergone and is still undergoing a striking upsurge of activity since the death of Stalin seven years ago. The results realized to date and planned for the future are considerable (especially on Soviet standards, of course, the “pre-Thaw” basis for comparison being so meager): six- or seven-fold increase in feature film production, construction of four new film studios and reconstruction of several existing ones, the US-Soviet film exchange, the Moscow International Film Festival last August, establishment of a National Festival of Soviet Films with annual “Academy Awards” determined by secret ballot.

Publishing of film literature, handled by “*Iskusstvo*” Press in Moscow, is expanding not only in volume but also in depth, covering new fields and making available many Western works in translation. Lindgren’s *Art of the Film*,¹ Mankell’s *Film and the Public*, two of Sadoul’s general histories of the cinema, Martin’s *Le langage cinématographique*, as well as works by René Clair, John Gassner (on the theater), Luigi Chiarini, and Pierre Leprohon have become accessible to Russian readers in the past three years. Among forthcoming books are a large “definitive” volume on Chaplin by Avenarius, a 700-page collection of articles on French cinema, an English-Russian photo- and film-dictionary, translations of Arnheim’s *Film as Art*, of

Reisz's *Technique of Film Editing*, of *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* by "the progressive American screen writer J. H. Lawson," of eight U.S. scripts, mostly from Gassner and Nichols' collection (*Kane*, *Informer*, *Farewell to Arms*—but also *Face in the Crowd* and *The Defiant Ones*) and a volume of studies devoted to John Ford, which will include an old article by Eisenstein, "Mister Ford's Mister Lincoln" (recently published for the first time in *Iskusstvo kino*).

Here is a sort of reversal of the direction of cinematic thought in the 'thirties, when the Russian theorists Eisenstein and Pudovkin were being widely read and quoted in the West.

The Russians, however, continue to give most of their attention to the home product, and do a good job of it, in terms of amount of documentation and scope of published works. One such book recently received for review is *Mosfilm*, Vol. 1, a large, quality, hard-cover collection of pictures and articles centered around Mosfilm studios and the film-makers who have worked or are working there. The interesting preface relates the history of this leading Soviet studio from its founding and early development in the late 'twenties to the quantitative and qualitative upsurge of the post-Stalin era. Among the large number of substantial historical and theoretical articles are contributions by Pyriev, Yutkevich, and Dzigan on the art of the director (the latter two, Yutkevich's "Director's Counterpoint" and Dzigan's "Shooting Script," being extracts from forthcoming separate books), a nice collection of photos of Pudovkin tracing his entire career from youth to his last films, with many production stills of the master at work, articles on the comeback of Ilyinsky, the old time comedian, on the latest developments in makeup, a translation from the ubiquitous French critic Sadoul, and others too numerous to mention. Future volumes of *Mosfilm*, to appear on an irregular basis, are to be looked forward to.

Two other Soviet film studies received for review are 200–250-page paperback monographs on the Ukrainian directors Alexander Dovzhenko (1894–1956) and Igor Savchenko

(1906–50). These are two of a series of brochures entitled "Masters of Film Art" (Bondarchuk, Yutkevich, and Kalatozov are to be covered this year) very similar to the French series "Classiques du Cinéma." Each brochure consists of several chapters on the film-maker's career, describing in detail and in chronological order his films, with considerable emphasis on the political and sociological interpretation thereof. Little is said about the director's life outside of motion pictures and criticism, so that, for instance, one does not learn how or exactly when the 44-year-old Savchenko died.

Each of the two volumes concludes with 25–30 pages of stills (where we see a charming shot of the young Dovzhenko in his only acting role, as a righteous proletarian train fireman in his own cloak-and-dagger thriller *Diplomatic Courier's Pouch*) and with a very detailed filmography. Compilation of the latter is not so difficult in the low production conditions of the USSR, where Dovzhenko's credits total only 14 films, from the early comedy shorts *Little Basil the Reformer* and *Fruits of Love* ('26) to *Michurin* ('48). (*Poem of the Sea* was finished by others after Dovzhenko's death.) Savchenko's credits surpass his fellow Ukrainian's by one—a total of 15 pictures, including shorts and scripts directed by others. The Dovzhenko volume also includes a meticulous bibliography, running to 20 pages, of his published writings.

An important place in Soviet film study is occupied by the "literary scenario," and frequently a collected volume of some writer's scripts will appear in print (e.g., Dovzhenko's complete works in three volumes). General historical studies include S. Ginzburg's on the Soviet animated film; a three-volume "Outline of the History of Soviet Motion Pictures" now being completed; a 600-page pictorial history of the Soviet screen (*Iskusstvo millionov*); histories of cinema in the Ukraine and other union republics. Ambitious works planned for the future include a large encyclopedia along the lines of the new Italian *Filmlexicon* and possibly an industry newspaper.

At present there are three annuals: *Voprosy*

kinoiskusstva (theoretical), *Ezhegodnik kino* (yearbook of film production), and *Iz istorii kino* (historical). Among journals are two technical monthlies for the film and TV technician and for the projectionist, a pictorial biweekly (*Sovetsky ekran*), and the big general monthly *Iskusstvo kino* (hereafter, *IK* for short) to be discussed below. The Russian film public, thus, after suffering through a dearth of both films and writing about films in the Stalinist artistic depression, is finally beginning — quantitatively speaking, at any rate — to get them.

Everything mentioned heretofore is in Russian, and so of very limited accessibility in the linguistically isolationist United States as well as elsewhere. The Soviets have therefore helpfully done a few translations of their own into English, of books by Eisenstein and Cherkasov and of *Soviet Film*, a new English-language pictorial monthly (available also in French, German, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian editions), devoted to newly released Soviet movies.²

Soviet Film is the Russian attempt at a Hollywood studio's publicity brochure of coming attractions, and is aimed at the general public rather than the serious film student, for whom its only value lies in making available cursory material on new Soviet pictures.

Similar in format and content to the preceding is *Sovetsky ekran* ("Soviet Screen"), a popular (circ. 250,000) pictorial biweekly in Russian.³ Intended for the home audience, it calls a spade a spade in reviewing bad Soviet films, and also includes interesting articles on the careers of veteran film-makers, sketches of cinema history in the other socialist states, a crossword puzzle, and a readers' column.

The USSR's serious film journal is *Iskusstvo kino* ("Art of the Cinema").⁴ In authority (the official organ of the Ministry of Culture and the Film Industry Workers' Union), in content and approach (theoretical-historical-critical), and in circulation (19,760 at the end of last year), *IK* is the Soviet equivalent of *Sight & Sound*. Considering that *Sight & Sound* is a quarterly, its circulation of 16,000 (= 64,000 per year) falls far below that of *IK* (around 237,000 annually). Yet it should be remembered that, in the USSR,

IK enjoys a monopolistic position in its field, while England has at least three serious journals. Since *IK* is intimately connected with the film industry as well as with official government policy-making, a study of the contents of recent issues reveals a great deal about all aspects of cinema in the Soviet Union.

For such a large format—160 8x10" pages, much in small print—*IK* is very readably and carefully printed.⁵ The paper is not too substantial, however, nor is the reproduction of stills too sharp. The covers—with the exception of No. 10 last year, a very striking impressionist sketch of a man on the moon—are not particularly eye-catching.

Each issue includes many articles of considerable length (up to 15–20 pp.), plus a full-length, as yet unfilmed "literary scenario" of 30–50 pages. Each issue has at least one theoretical article which belongs almost as much to a magazine of Communist moral and educational theory as to a film journal, and as often as not the lead article is a reprinting or discussion of a party decree on the relation of socialist art to reality. About twenty pages are given to "Critical Survey," usually handled by a single critic, different each issue, who reviews under one heading several new pictures with something in common. The film production of a union republic (e.g., Georgia, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan) or of another country in the "socialist camp" (often Red China) usually has a long article each month.

Other regular departments include letters from readers; complete credits of all new films including shorts; a new column for amateur movie-makers (primarily those concerned with technical and industrial topics); book reviews and long extracts from books to be published; detailed information about past and future meetings of film-makers and scholars; articles and briefs on world cinema and on forthcoming Soviet releases; a satire column (feuilleton), the best of which, by Alexander Latsis, lampoons a fictional Soviet bureaucrat obsessed with the idea of retitling all foreign films.

In the historical line, *IK* publishes articles by film-makers like Dziga Vertov (often for the

first time and/or posthumously), or reminiscences by or about some of the old masters, such as Vishnevsky's work on *We Are from Kronstadt* or Tisse's newsreel activity in the midst of the civil war, outlines for unfinished scripts—e.g., the late Dovzhenko's *In the Depths of the Cosmos* on a flight to Mars; and collections of old documents, pictures, and correspondence, such as one about the making, in consultation with jet-propulsion pioneer Tsiołkowski, of a picture on a trip to the moon, directed and written by Basil Zhuravlev and the famous literary critic Victor Shklovsky in the early 'thirties. Frequently, however, the historical materials are devoted to the economic and political side of the prerevolutionary Russian cinema and to its nationalization two years after the Revolution; one such article (by a Ph.D. in history) analyzes in detail all the documents relating to the one and only film made and shown on Lenin's direct order—about hydraulic peat extraction.

An interesting aspect of *IK*'s contributors, reflecting its status as organ of the Film Workers' Union, is the presence of several film-makers on the 12-member editorial board: among others, feature directors Ivan Pyriev and Serge Yutkevich, documentary-makers Eli Kopalín and Roman Karmen, and writers A. Zguridi, M. Papava, and M. Smirnova. And these are not "honorary" members either—they contribute frequent reviews and theoretical articles and discuss their own work, as do many others in the industry. For example, in issue 6 of last year director Gregory Roshal wrote a 10-page review of recent productions of the Kazakh union republic and director Michael Romm wrote 16 pages on the theory of editing (most of the latter, incidentally, is a reworking of Eisenstein's analysis of literary works as if they were written for the screen). The preceding issue contains articles by Pyriev and J. Heifitz, two directors "defending" their latest works. Pyriev gave a lengthy and extremely illuminating explanation of why and how he went about interpreting Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, taking "the corrupting power of money" as his central theme. He related how he finally chose two unknowns for the key roles after having given up the script, which

he had written back in '47, because at first he couldn't find suitable performers (perhaps also because Dostoyevsky was given a wide berth generally in the Soviet Union until "the Thaw" when he regained his pre-1930 literary status).

Thus we may suppose that *IK* serves as a good reflection of the viewpoints of the film-makers themselves, unlike the U.S. situation where film journals generally reflect independent criticism. Nor, at the same time, is *IK* free of policy-making: it is the instrument used to communicate to the film-makers official party and government policy and also the policies decided upon by the heads of the industry. This feeling is evident in many articles, perhaps most directly stated by critic V. Razumny:

"... film criticism and theory certainly cannot restrict themselves to simple observation of the esthetic imperfection of individual films. *Their task is not passive recording of facts, but effective interference in the practice of film art.*" (*IK* '59.4:125; italics mine).

This illustrates *IK*'s heterogeneous nature: aside from the normal duties of a serious film journal, it also fulfills those of official spokesman for the Communist Party and the Ministry of Culture, sounding board for the Film Workers' Union (in effect, the entire industry), and clearing house for information on technical and educational films and filmstrips intended for industrial or school distribution. And now it is taking on a new duty: in response to a suggestion from a group of workers, *IK* encourages its readers to submit stories, outlines, facts, and ideas for future films, all of which it will forward to studio script departments, publishing the best itself in a new department called "Attention Comrade Film-makers!"

Evidently all that is now missing is a gossip column! It seems likely that eventually *IK*'s make-up will become too unwieldy and it will be split into at least two monthlies of more limited scope. The suggestion at a recent conference of the creation of a cinema newspaper is indicative of this trend.

In *IK* generally there is a good deal of freedom for expression of views and controversy,

although criticism, whether on the theoretical or the critical level, does not touch basic Communist philosophy but rather the ways in which it can best be expressed cinematically. To quote Mark Donskoy, the Ukrainian director:

"Our enemies abroad 'accuse' us of being propagandists of communism. Yes, we are conscious propagandists of communism. This penetrates all our feelings and actions. By our creations we serve the cause of the party; we cannot conceive our life differently." (*IK* '57.11:11.)

A very spirited controversy enlivening recent issues of *IK* was stirred up by prose and screen writer Victor Nekrasov when he criticized Dovzhenko's posthumously filmed script *Poem of the Sea* for being overdone, too poetic and generalized, for the unlikely coincidence on which the plot was built, and for the impossibility of audience identification. The explosion of angry rebuttals defending the film as a masterpiece, plus some taking a middle ground or siding with Nekrasov, were so numerous that *IK* set up a special section "On Artistic Principles, Views, and Tastes" to accommodate them. The controversy lasted several months. All kinds of theoretical and aesthetic arguments were utilized by the contributors in asserting their own points of view, and the main upshot of the debate, as stated by the editors, was proof that "Ideological unity of artists who see the goal and meaning of their lives and creative work in the struggle for communism does not in any way demand uniformity of artistic means. . . . Socialistic art is as many-colored as the solar spectrum." (*IK* '59.10:46.) In recent issues there have been many such statements mentioning approvingly the variety of genres and techniques in contemporary Soviet film-making.

Last year *IK* began a new department, "International Tribune," with letters from Jay Leyda and Jean Renoir, among others, in reply to an earlier article (which appeared later in English translation: *Sight & Sound*, Summer '59) by Gregory Kozintsev on "The Deep Screen," espousing humanism and international exchange of ideas among film-makers.

Letters from readers often contain complaints or suggestions. There was an amusing case of a

reader who sent in an eloquent outline for a documentary on the Siberian wilderness with all its natural beauty. This was duly forwarded to the head of the scenario department of the Moscow Popular-Science Film Studio only to have it flatly rejected with the answer that those regions had already been reflected in several films. *IK* retaliated by printing this rejection note with



these comments: "What an excuse! . . . a typical bureaucratic document. . . . Perhaps the Film Production Administration will look differently at this sensible and timely suggestion?" (*IK* '59.10:158.)

This spirit is found also in the organization of production at the chief Soviet studio, Mosfilm. Last year the national policy of industrial and agricultural decentralization penetrated to Mosfilm, which was subdivided into three "Production Groups" (*tvorcheskiye obyedinenia*) under a General Director (V. Surin) who is responsible directly to the Minister of Culture. The general director is assisted by a board of leading film-makers which discusses major policy questions. The three Production Groups, headed respectively by Alexandrov, Pyriev, and

Romm, each assisted by a council of co-workers, include all responsible members of production units. According to Romm, "all basic artistic problems will be decided within the group," which will make eight-ten films per year in his case, probably with permanent production units. Each group will operate on a self-supporting basis, paying for studio space, sets, and props.

The Mosfilm reorganization does not necessarily signify corresponding "liberal" trends in all parts of the Soviet motion picture industry. Another of Khrushchev's recent important reforms, to combine work experience with college-level education, has been introduced into the All-Union State Motion Picture Institute (VGIK), the training ground of future film-makers. Henceforth two years' work experience is required for admission to the Institute. Also scripters and set designers have to defend their thesis projects on the screen, students will build their own sets, and correspondence study is considerably expanded.

The freedom to criticize and suggest enjoyed by the public (through the letters column of *IK*) also extends to other fields. One of *IK*'s frequent features is a "Round Table"—twenty pages of discussion excerpted from a stenographic recording of meetings organized by the editors. Once last year (issue 4) the participants in such a round table, together with some prominent film-makers, were Moscow factory workers, and most of the discussion consisted of the workers' opinions on what was wrong with the portrayal of industry and its workers in Soviet films! In July '59 the editors arranged a trip for several film-makers to visit collective farms around Riazan to study the life there and talk with the inhabitants.

Thus it is evident that there are many tangible forms of pressure on Soviet film-makers, from below as well as from above. How do they find time to fulfill all their duties? The answer is that Soviet film production is still only 50 per cent of ours (at the feature level), with the result that many directors—and other film workers—at any given time have no project to work on, the most common complaint being of course the lack of good scripts. From his production group at

Mosfilm, Alexandrov in a recent issue mentions Roshal, Bondarchuk, Room, Stroyeva, Pronin, Saakov, Trakhtenberg, and two freshman directors—a total of nine—all looking for scripts at the moment, and names ten directors who are working on pictures. Therefore there is no lack of time for writing and other activities concerned with filming, including teaching, a task which some film-makers perform at VGIK along with their other duties.

Many as yet unresolved problems and obstacles encountered in the rebuilding of the Soviet film industry are candidly discussed in the pages of *IK*. Those which will be most easily overcome relate undoubtedly to technical proficiency and personnel. The documentary and newsreel field is admittedly suffering seriously from inadequate and out-dated sound recording equipment, the upshot being that most factual films have to be post-synchronized in the studio (*IK* '59.10:135-9). Film copies exhibited in theaters are often hazy, and the quality of color film, especially positive, is very low ('59.8: 124).

The personnel shortage is felt most keenly at the script level, especially in the newer studios. An example is the Ukrainian Odessa studio, whose young directors have recently turned out some good (and some very bad) first or second pictures, all of which were discussed in the "Round Table" ('58.6:1-15). Some of the main complaints which were brought up concerned the position of screen writers, most of whom were free-lance and consequently were not given any schooling by the studio; the logical solution was proposed: the establishment of a scenario workshop with a permanent staff of writers (improvements in this line have also been considered for Mosfilm).

Russian movies are commonly criticized for failings arising from another source: ideological content. To quote theorist V. Razumny from an article, "The Ethical and the Esthetic," in which he clearly expounds the Communist theory of art: ". . . the artist of socialist realism is first of all a politician, who knows how to approach political generalizations through an ethical collision . . ." (*IK* '59.4:33; italics his).

In numerous reviews this necessity for generalization from little events and average citizens, for reading didactic, political significance into them, is an important factor in the evaluation of a film. A special terminology exists for labeling these aspects of film-making: *masstabnost*, "scope," "large-scale-ness," indicates the proper breadth of generalization; its opposite, *melkotemyeh*, translates beautifully as "petty themery," i.e., concentration on the theme of "the little man" and his problems as individual phenomena without social implications. By the way, these "little people," the plague of Soviet Marxist critics in recent years, are straight out of Italian neorealism, which has exerted a marked influence—not entirely appreciated—on filmmaking in the USSR. It is interesting to note in passing that the great controversy around Nekrasov's criticism of *Poem of the Sea* centered on his charge of *illustrativnost*, i.e., that the characters are too generalized and schematic, too much above the average of the little man, for audience identification.

One critic, N. Klado, distinguishes "theme" and "idea"—the former being what a film is about, the latter "what it fights for, a reflection of the author's individual attitude to reality and life." Nowadays the theme is giving the most trouble—there is too little variety of genres: "Scientific workers justly complain that insignificantly few films are devoted to their lives and work . . . the majority of our comedies are made, alas, on a low artistic level: . . . The science fiction film has been almost forgotten. . . . Lack of system and haphazardness reign in the production of musicals . . ." says critic I. Rachuk ('59. 10:49–50).

The most serious laggard is the comedy (including the musical comedy), which understandably is a rather dangerous field in the USSR—you have to be careful what you are poking fun at. Recently there has been an attempt by writer Mdivani and director Lukinsky at creating a series of comedies whose hero, "Ivan Brovkin," is a likable bumbler always in some sort of hot water. The second in the series—on collective farming of the virgin lands of Siberia—was panned by critics for losing the

freshness and charm of the original—on army life—while adding a stilted, conflictless plot. At the same time the need for good contemporary comedies is stressed constantly in *IK*, and when one does come off well, it is very warmly received.

Not only comedies but all genres of Soviet cinema experience the most trouble in treating the *contemporary* scene. The new column of *IK* inviting readers' contributions for scripts requires that they must "disclose what is characteristically *new* in Soviet life in the period of developed construction of communism." A major problem in working with contemporary subject matter is the characterization, where an elusive balance between generalization and humanization must be achieved. Heroes must be more than the neorealist little man, but cannot be "angelic" mouthpieces for communist slogans and nothing else.

Heroes are not the only personages threatened with stereotyping. *IK*'s critics in many films manage to find a heavy-like one spy, "always smiling ominously, eyes flashing, cursing under his breath, and besides committing such ridiculous, naively childish acts . . . that you're simply baffled that he isn't exposed at the first step." ('59. 9:75.)

Other stereotyped characters include the good-bad young man who redeems himself through an act of heroism at a big construction project or in the virgin lands, abandoned children who are taken in by good people, or the local Communist Party chairman, who is usually a *deus ex machina* humanized by having him "do a dance with the leading milkmaid," according to writer A. Levada. He goes on to say that "it is time to say good-bye to the idea of the literary process as the mechanical swinging of a pendulum from a person's productive occupation to the intimate relations of his home life, and back again." (*IK* '59. 6:101.) Rachuk, quoted above, explains that the real "positive hero is not a homunculus, developed in the quiet of the writer's laboratory, he must be seized from the stormy current of life, must act in the thick of the people, absorbing its best qualities—will, wit, clearness of purpose."

If the Soviet hero is to be a flesh and blood character drawn directly from reality, then what about his love life? In the past this has generally been avoided: "Our film-makers . . . shamefully raise the lens to the clouds at the moment when the hero pulls the heroine to his breast." (*IK* '59.4:131.) Not long ago *Sovetsky ekran* conducted a discussion on how much love can be shown on the screen. The problem lies in making love an integral part of the story and the hero's character (as in *The Cranes Are Flying*), not "an auxiliary device brought in to pep up the plot" like the cheap eroticism in Western films which Soviet critics constantly deride. In any case, the need for showing this side of human emotions is recognized by critics and readers, one of whom writes: "Why don't our movie masters show Romeo and Juliet in a new light? Don't we know how to love passionately? Work and love must be inseparable. The person who knows how to work well and beautifully, will also love well and beautifully." (*IK* '59.9: 137.) It will be interesting to see what results will come of the debating of these issues in the press, although it is doubtful that *IK* will ever start publishing glamor shots among its portraits of actors and actresses.

In spite of deep concern with ideological-didactic elements in the cinema, *IK* articles do pay great attention to artistic questions, and take special care to commend well-made pictures. Also very important to note is the recent organization of annual "Academy"-type awards for many categories of films and individual creative roles, behind and in front of the camera.

Outstanding films are discussed at length in separate articles; e.g., Tikhomirov's *Eugene Onegin* and Roshal's *Bleak Morning* (No. 7 last year) and a "Round Table" symposium (No. 5) devoted entirely to Bondarchuk's *A Man's Fate*, which was later to win the Grand Prize at the Moscow Festival.⁶ Bondarchuk was particularly lauded for his directorial ability to integrate his own acting role into the story, while cameraman V. Monakhov was credited with some fine scenes, such as the German plane's attack on the hero's car. Serge Yutkevich commended Bon-

darchuk for showing an individual style in his direction. One of the few complaints was voiced by *IK* editor Pogozheva, on the lack of humor.

Special articles are occasionally devoted to a performer, such as the somewhat overenthusiastic praise ('59.7:84-8) lavished on the promising young Ukrainian actress Zinaida Kiriyenko, who has had important roles in several big pictures recently (*Poem of the Sea*, *A Man's Fate*, *Thieving Magpie*, etc.). However, there is nothing like the preoccupation with stars—at the expense of other film-makers—which handicaps such journals as *Films in Review*.

Generally speaking, reviews give attention to the different creative occupations proportionate to the order in which all credits are listed in Soviet film publications: script writer, director, cameraman, art director, composer, with actors perhaps coming after the director in importance. Note that no credits (or annual awards) are given for editing. In the USSR the actual cutting and splicing is done by *montazhnitsy* (women), but apparently at the order of the director. It is interesting that there is little discussion of editing in reviews, although there are occasional complaints that a picture seems fragmentary. At a conference of cameramen and art directors one participant observed that "lately many pictures are very badly edited," indicating that this phase of film production, once so highly developed in the Soviet Union, now finds itself in a state of neglect.

The "Critical Survey" for issue 9 of last year made novel reading through critic Y. Haniutin's wittily described experiment of attending every new feature—good or bad—shown at one theater during two months. (He had been prompted by a poll of four film-makers and a critic, not one of whom had seen half of the approximately 100 features produced the previous year.)

In a serious (and courageous) mood he speaks about the cliché of the "sharp upturn" of film production in the union republics (usually pampered by Russian critics) and reminds us that "behind individual successes we sometimes forget about the general level of pictures which still does not satisfy even the gentlest demands."

Haniutin's summary of results is very enlightening, as are his conclusions. For one month, out of eight films which he saw, only one was an "indisputed success": George Chuliukin's *The Unruly Ones*. This was about a well-meaning girl who ineptly tries to reform two Dead-End-Kid types working in a factory. She is successful only when they take pity on her. The best part of the film, according to the critic, was the successful comedy treatment of a contemporary factory locale—no small accomplishment, surely.

Four of the eight were "complete fiascos," and three were in-between, including a Soviet *Knock on Any Door* about a gang of juvenile delinquents. Haniutin concludes:

"This proportion cannot help but cause alarm. . . . We proudly count up the figures of the growth of film production: 60 films per year, 80, 100. At one time quantitative growth was very important—it was necessary to unleash all the productive forces of the motion picture industry. Now we put out many films. And the question of quality becomes decisive." (*IK* '59.9:75.)

To conclude, something must be said about foreign coverage in *IK*, which beats our coverage of cinema in "the socialist camp." To quote a letter which I received recently from *Iskusstvo* Press Editor A. Karaganov: "At the present time we are systematically following American literature on motion picture art, and that is why we, just like you, feel more and more the need for an English-Russian Film Dictionary" (a suggestion I had made).

Frequently *IK* publishes interviews or translations of articles by Western critics or filmmakers, many of whom tend to the left (e.g., the French Marxist Georges Sadoul), and some of whom discuss their trials and tribulations in making films under the "conditions of capitalist financing, distribution, and censorship" (e.g., De Santis). A big spread was given to Chaplin on his seventieth birthday, complete with stills from all his important films. Occasionally scenarios by foreigners are published, such as an East German answer to Lamorisse's *Red Balloon* emphasizing happiness in collective play.

Western, especially American, technical progress is paid close attention. In many issues there is an article by a Soviet critic or a translated letter from a film critic abroad reviewing current production in that country, such as Sadoul on the "New Wave" (*IK* '59.9:125-33; published by *Sight & Sound*, Summer '59). *IK* also likes to print interviews or letters from foreign film-makers who discuss the influence played in their country by the big Soviet silent films and theoretical books of the 'twenties and 'thirties.

In the brief notes department "From Everywhere," Red China seems to be given the biggest coverage, followed by the United States, France, and Italy about equally. This Western coverage is accurate but the selection of many items is calculated not to underemphasize our economic woes—declining attendance, theater bankruptcies, etc., and in a long item on the Academy Awards it was mentioned that "Sidney Poitier, a Negro, was not given an Oscar for his brilliant performance in *The Defiant Ones*." Sweden receives little attention, and in the last several issues of *IK* Ingmar Bergman is discussed (briefly) only once, in connection with his *Wild Strawberries* in which "is depicted the life of simple people."

Issues 8 and 10 of last year gave extensive play to the Moscow Festival and the films shown there (13 of 24 awards went to the Communist bloc). Included were sum-ups by Gerasimov and Joris Ivens and four interviews with foreign directors by their Soviet counterparts. Yutkevich had a long talk with the UN's Thorold Dickinson on many subjects, including his *Queen of Spades* ('49) which Russians laughed at because it was so British and un-Russian; Dickinson thought the Soviet cinema should get away from so many war pictures (e.g., *A Man's Fate*), but Yutkevich countered with the desire to expose "those responsible for war and for armed intervention in others' internal affairs," citing *Attack* and *Paths of Glory* as good examples. Western use of professional actors in documentaries, a technique which Soviet film-makers deny on principle, was also a topic of debate between them and in another talk between documentary-makers Paul Paviot of France and Eli

Kopalina (a former assistant of Dziga Vertov's).

Soviet critics often mention two examples of Western influence on their films: neorealism with its self-centered "little man" and its pessimism, and interior monologue. They acknowledge the merits of neorealism—from the Soviet point of view, its negation of "capitalist, middle-class society"—but are none too happy when this negative pessimism turns up in Soviet movies supposedly giving a true picture of contemporary Soviet society in terms of squalor and lust.

Some aspects of Western cinema which are unreservedly panned by Soviet criticism are the new bloodthirsty horror cycle (e.g., a sarcastic article, *IK*, '59.7:152–3), and the portrayal of contemporary life either through crime, violence, and sex, or through sweetened sentimentality, in either case accompanied by refusal to face up to the "contradictions of capitalist society." An article summarizing the festival in Moscow, written by Gerasimov, is typical. He takes a favorable attitude to Fellini, whom "no one will accuse . . . of indifference—the greatest *crime for an artist*" (italics his), and to Kurt Hoffmann's *Aren't We Wonderful?* from West Germany (a Festival prize winner). He mourns over Rossellini's Indian fiasco, and lashes out again at his favorite whipping boy, Orson Welles, whom Gerasimov likes to cite as an illustration of all that's wrong with Western films: ". . . made in the spirit of 'Grand Guignol,' with surrealistic effects calculated for sensational shock and crushing the human spirit." (*IK* '59.10:11–15.)

Although Soviet criticism does show considerable interest in Western cinema, this concern is restricted mainly to the critical level, as opposed to the theoretical where thinking still tends to be rather parochial. A recent debate, lasting several issues, on the nature of the screenplay—whether it possesses specific cinematic qualities, its relation to literature, etc.—was waged mostly within the framework of Soviet film history and theory, which is why one article on the subject, by M. Bleiman ('59.7:67–75) is so striking. Bleiman stresses the necessity for analyzing the nature of the screenplay in its historical context, since its purpose has changed in the different periods of film

history, and in support of his contention he demonstrates good acquaintance with Western theory and history. He cites as examples the early theories of Bela Balasz and René Clair's *Entr'acte*; discusses the American silent comedy of Lloyd and Sennett and its replacement after sound by the "theatrical wit" of writers like Riskin for such directors as Capra, Lubitsch, and Koster; mentions the Hitchcock-style mystery as one genre which survived sound almost intact; shows that with sound the motion picture has tended to become more and more literary, less and less cinematic, with Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men* as perhaps the extreme case, although Tati's *Mon Oncle* is a complete exception. Of course Bleiman also refers to the theory and practice of the Soviet masters—Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Gabrilovich, etc.—but these are balanced by knowledgeable incorporation of Western cinema history into the development of Bleiman's own theory.

NOTES

1. An instance of the cheapness of Russian books compared with ours: the Russian translation of Lindgren can be bought in the U.S. for \$1.50, while the original English edition sells here for \$4.50.

2. Available, like a number of the items mentioned, through Four Continent Book Corporation, 822 Broadway, New York 3, N.Y.—\$2 for a one-year subscription.

3. Four dollars per year in the United States.

4. Thirteen dollars per year in the United States.

5. There is a certain difficulty in handling English names; they come out, in Cyrillic spelling: Lewis "Jilbert," Delmer "Davis," "Well-es" in two syllables, Yul "Brünner," "Vinchenty" Minnelli, "Jane" Simmons, Stanley "Kabrick." But then, who can complain? Look at the atrocities we commit on Russian names trying to spell them in English.

6. All three of these—and many other current Soviet pictures are film versions of outstanding literary works. Others which have come to the screen recently include Gogol's *Overcoat* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, neither of which met with much enthusiasm among the critics. A campaign is now under way to film the works of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the Futurist poet and playwright (and movie actor) the eccentricity of whose behavior was surpassed only by that of his verse, and who has long been a touchy subject for Soviet library scholars.